



# 2021-2022 Student Organization Advisor Handbook



UNIVERSITY of  
**SOUTH FLORIDA**  
Student Success

## Introduction

This handbook is intended to be a tool for all advisors of student organizations at the University of South Florida. It includes helpful information for advisors about university policies, procedures, and operations to ensure a successful year for your student group. Please take some time to familiarize yourself with this handbook and the Activity and Service (A&S) Fee guidelines and procedures (available in the [SG portal in BullsConnect](#)). These resources provide answers to questions about organizational responsibilities, advertising and publicity, membership, student activity fee usage, fundraising, event planning, and the services offered to organizations.

If you find something that is unclear or not addressed, please let us know. We strive to remove as many barriers as possible to make your experience as an advisor to a student organization a positive one, for both you and the organization. Additionally, many student organization resources and processes can be found online at our student engagement platform, [BullsConnect](#).

## Student Organization Requirements

To keep “active” status, all organizations at USF must meet the following requirements:

- Have a full-time faculty or staff member serve in an advisor capacity
- Re-register the organization’s portal in BullsConnect each academic year

### Advisor Requirement for Student Organizations

It is a requirement that all USF student organizations have a faculty or staff advisor. Advisors are extremely important in helping keep organizations on track! The advisor not only serves as a representative of the group in an official capacity, but also as a student advocate. An advisor is one who gives ideas, shares insight, provides a different perspective, and encourages organization members.

## What are the Responsibilities of an Advisor?

*(The following is adapted from the Resource and Policy Manual, Virginia Commonwealth University)*

Good advisors keep the following three sets of responsibilities in mind while working with student organizations:

1. Individual group members
2. the student organization
3. the institution

### Responsibility to Individual Group Members

1. The advisor should help the students find balance between their academics and co-curricular activities. Student leaders often burn the candle at both ends and may overextend themselves. The advisor has the unique opportunity to remind students of their academic and personal needs.
2. The advisor should encourage each individual to participate in and plan group events. Some students fade into the background if not effectively encouraged. Being a member of a student group can provide students with valuable interpersonal and/or leadership skills, but these will not develop if the student is not involved.
3. The advisor should encourage students to accept responsibility for specific roles within the group. The advisor should help them realize the importance of these roles. From officer positions to committee members, each student should feel invested in and accountable for their specific role.

## Responsibility to the Student Organization

1. The advisor should assist the group in developing realistic goals, strategic planning, and training for the academic year. This will contribute to the education and personal development of the students involved. The advisor must take an active role, rendering advice and counsel as circumstances dictate.
2. The advisor should be aware of all plans and activities of the group and inform the group of institutional policies that may affect these plans. The advisor should ensure the group and its officers know where policies are listed, what the policies are, why they exist, and the channels to be followed for changes, revisions, or exceptions to policies. Advisors should also participate in the planning/review of each activity.
3. The advisor should be available to organization officers/members and regularly meet with the organization. Being visible is one key aspect of being an advisor. When members feel they can talk to their advisor about issues within the organization or other things bothering them an organization will be better off.
4. The advisor should discourage dominance of the group by any one individual and should encourage less involved students to take initiative. Eager leaders often provide strong leadership more often than necessary. This can lead to resentment by some or pressure others into silencing themselves. The advisor can help provide a balance by pointing out such concerns in a one-on-one setting with the students or the organization leadership.
5. The advisor may need to refer students to counseling. Invariably, during interaction with the group's members, the advisor will encounter students with personal problems. The counseling role might require individual consultation on a personal level or referral to the student counseling service.
6. The advisor should provide continuity within the group and should be familiar with the group's history and constitution. Membership turnover in student organizations is high and often the only link with the immediate past is the advisor. The advisor can steer group members clear of mistakes and help them avoid the proverbial reinventing of the wheel. Serving as the group's memory and continuity link, the advisor can help new officers build on history and develop long term plans for the future of the organization.
7. The advisor should offer ideas for projects and events. The advisor will perform their greatest service by providing opportunities for the students to exercise initiative and judgment and to enjoy a proper measure of autonomy in self-directed social, educational, recreational, cultural, and spiritual activities. Advisors should not dominate the program planning process. However, advisors should ensure the group understands a program's complexity and has discussed the necessary steps that need to take place in order for the program to be successful. The advisor should remember it is the task of the active members to operate the organization. Removing this responsibility from the members would deprive them of an important educational experience.
8. The advisor should assist the group in evaluation. This includes evaluating individual programs as well as doing a complete evaluation at the end of the academic year. The advisor must be willing to give constructive criticism when necessary and offer words of praise for work well done.

9. The advisor should maintain continuity and tradition of organization as members graduate. This includes knowing the history and being passionate about teaching the new members what the organizations means.

### **Responsibility to the University of South Florida**

The advisor should be aware of USF policies and procedures. Advisors should remember student organizations represent the institution and therefore should be following all university policies.

1. The advisor should work with the group, but not direct its activities. Although the advisor's role is not regulatory or disciplinary, the advisor has a responsibility to both the institution and the organization to keep their best interests in mind. At times, the advisor may need to remind the organization of institutional policies so violations do not occur. The advisor may also work with the organization's officers to establish and maintain internal group standards and regulations for conduct.
2. Occasionally, an advisor can help an organization during an emergency. Although this type of intervention is rarely necessary, the advisor's good judgment can be the saving grace in the event of mishaps, internal conflict, or personal crisis. Assisting the group's president as a spokesperson or serving as the main contact for the University can help in these cases.
3. Serve as a [Title IX](#) Mandatory Reporter. If an organization advisor learns about a Title IX situation occurring within an organization, the advisor should submit an incident request form found on the [Dean of Students webpage](#).

### **Additional Advisors**

Often, organizations may have advisors who are directly affiliated with the organization they are advising, particularly if it is a regional or national organization. An example of this includes, but is not limited to, fraternity and sorority alumni/ae chapter advisors. Organizations are asked to include these advisors as part of your organization contact list.

## Advisor Liability

Advisors to student organizations accept an added responsibility. The type of liability or risk for the advisor varies greatly depending upon the type of organization. What follows are some suggestions to assist with an advisor's responsibility regarding liability issues or concerns:

- Understand as an employee of a public institution all advisors are subject to the constraint of the federal constitution, state and local laws.
- Try to anticipate risks which may arise out of any decision or situation and then discuss with the officers what they can do to minimize risks. Regardless of what organization or activity is involved, there will always be an opportunity for something out of the ordinary to happen. However, if decisions are made consistently and in good faith, and reasonable precautions are taken, then the risk involved can be minimized.
- It is important to be aware of university policies and regulations as they affect student organizations. The USF Office of General Counsel and the Student Organization Handbook are great sources for university rules and regulations.
- Advisors should never enter into contracts on behalf of a student organization.
- Advisors are advised to not be listed on organization's bank accounts as by doing so, the advisor takes on an additional financial liability.

## Organization Bank Accounts and Tax Identification Numbers

It is often beneficial for student organizations to have an off-campus checking account to deposit dues and any revenue generated from fundraising that did not involve student activity fees. By having an off-campus checking account, student organization leaders can more readily make payments and purchase items. As a student organization advisor, it is not recommended that your name is on an off-campus bank account. It should be the students' responsibility to maintain the account.

For more information, please visit the [Student Organization Handbook](#) published in BullsConnect.

## Advisor-Leader Conversation Starter

The success and effectiveness of your organization can be improved a great deal through a good relationship between advisor and student leader. In the advisor/student leader pairing, a general understanding and a concerted effort to develop the relationship is essential. Too often we take relationships for granted and think things will automatically fall in place. As in all relationships, it is important to learn about one another's expectations, goals, wants, needs, strengths and weaknesses. To help you do just that, we have provided you with the following list of questions. We encourage you to sit down together and discuss your answers to the questions provided.

1. What motivated you to assume your position (advisor or leader)?
2. What are you most excited about as we begin this year?
3. What are you most anxious about as we begin this year?
4. What personal and/or professional goals have you made for this year?
5. When you think about your skills and abilities, what would you list as your strong points?
6. When you think about your skills and abilities, in what areas would you like to improve?
7. What are you hoping to learn from this experience?
8. Which of your personal qualities do you admire most?
9. What kind of advisor/student relationship would you like to see?
10. What kind of relationship would you like to have with the other officers?
11. How would you describe your advising/leadership style?
12. What techniques do you use to motivate yourself and others?
13. When you are upset or disappointed about someone's behavior or performance, how do you respond?
14. When people meet or exceed your expectations, how do you respond?
15. What are some of the things you think we should do in training officers and members?
16. When considering your position, in what areas do you feel confident or comfortable? In what ways are you least comfortable?

## Advising Tips

*(The following is adapted from Lenoir-Rhyne College's Advisor Handbook.)*

Every student organization will differ and may require a different approach by the advisor. The following information can serve as a starting point.

1. In the beginning of the advising relationship, agree on clear expectations about the role of the advisor and the role of the student organization. Discuss philosophies and reach a consensus.
2. Read the constitution of the group, get to know the members, attend events, and generally make yourself seen so that they know who you are.
3. Assist in the establishment of responsibilities for each officer and member.
4. Develop a strong relationship with the president or chairperson and other officers. This is key because these students will be your main contact with the group.
5. Remember: praise in public, criticize in private. Discuss concerns with an officer's performance in a one-on-one setting. Whenever someone does something extremely well, be sure to let others know.
6. Maintain a sense of humor — its college, not rocket science.
7. Be honest and open with all communication. The students need to feel that you are just in your dealings with them.
8. Realize you have the power of persuasion, but use this judiciously. The students sometimes need to learn how to fail.
9. Help them see alternatives and provide an outside perspective.
10. Find a balance between being the strict naysayer and the laissez-faire friend. The students must feel you are supportive of them and yet will hold them accountable.

## Twenty Tips to Increase Group Productivity

*(Adapted from M. J. Michal)*

1. Know what the students expect of you as an advisor.
2. Let the group and individual members know what you expect of them.
3. Express a sincere interest in the group and its mission. Stress the importance of each individual's contribution to the whole.
4. Assist the group in setting realistic, attainable goals. Ensure success in the first project undertaken, and then increase responsibility.
5. Have the goals or objectives of the group firmly in mind. Know the purpose of the group and know what things need to be accomplished to meet the goal.
6. Assist each member in meeting his or her needs while helping the group achieve its goals. Understand why people become involved. Learn strengths and emphasize on them. Help each person grow and learn through their involvement by providing opportunities.
7. Know and understand the students with whom you are working. Different groups require different approaches.



8. Assist the group in determining the needs of the people the group is serving.
9. Express a sincere interest in each member. Encourage everyone to be responsible.
10. Assist the members in understanding the group's dynamics and human interaction. Recognize, at times, the process is more important than the content.
11. Realize the importance of the peer group and its effect on each member's participation or lack thereof. Communicate that each individual's efforts are needed and appreciated.
12. Assist the group in developing a system by which they can evaluate their progress. Balance task orientation with social needs of the members.
13. Use a reward and recognition system for work well done.
14. Develop a style that balances active and passive group membership.
15. Be aware of the various roles you will have: clarifier, consultant, counselor, educator, facilitator, friend, information source, mentor, and role model.
16. Do not allow yourself to be placed in the position of the chairperson.
17. Be aware of the institutional power structure--both formal and informal. Discuss institutional developments and policies with members.
18. Provide continuity for the group from semester to semester.
19. Challenge the group to grow and develop. Encourage independent thinking and decision-making.
20. Be creative and innovative. Keep a sense of humor!

## **Eleven Skills for Advisors to Teach**

*(Adapted from Kathleen Allen article in the December 1979 issue of Programming Magazine)*

As an advisor you are a role model, mentor, and teacher for the group. In your role as a teacher, you can help the students develop certain knowledge, skills, and abilities that will help make the organization more effective and that they can use in the future. Kathleen Allen, in the December 1979 issue of Programming magazine, outlined eleven skills she recommends be taught to students through consistent planned advising. Divided into the categories of accomplishing tasks, improving relationships, and self-improvement, her outline provides a clear, comprehensive lesson plan for advisors to utilize in their efforts toward student skill development.

### **Skills for Accomplishing Tasks**

1. **Problem Solving:** the ability to solve problems creatively. The process includes these components: identify the real problem, assess all components of the problem, weigh what is relevant, pursue alternatives, and identify a solution. Example: developing a policy.
2. **Planning and Organization:** the ability to set goals and coordinate a variety of human and material resources to accomplish these goals. Example: producing a specific event.

3. Delegating: the ability to identify or develop a task, and then share the responsibility, authority, resources, and information needed to accomplish it. Example: committee leader assigning a member a task.
4. Decision-making: the ability to evaluate existing information and to be willing and confident enough to make a choice of what should be done. Example: choosing a speaker for a lecture.
5. Financial Management: the ability to plan, develop, and implement a budget, including cost and expense estimates, budget implementation, and budget evaluation. Example: implementing a budget for each event.

### **Skills for Improving Relationships**

6. Persuasion: the ability to identify our own opinions and use logic and communication to change the opinions of others. Example: choosing between two programs.
7. Relationship-building: the process of creating, developing, and maintaining connections between groups or individuals. Example: scheduling frequent casual meetings with organization members.
8. Adaptability: the ability to cope with a variety of situations and kinds of people. Example: working with people with different cultural backgrounds or values.

### **Skills for Self-Improvement**

9. Stress Tolerance: the ability to cope with taxing situations, while getting the job done and having a satisfying life. Example: performing leadership responsibilities while anxious about a personal relationship.
10. Initiative: the ability to take responsibility for originating new projects, ability to think and act without being urged, the ability to develop new ideas or methods. Example: initiating a recruitment campaign for new members.
11. Risk-taking: the willingness to try something new or make a decision without the assurance of success or improvement. Example: planning a program that has not been attempted before.

## A Checklist for Advisors

Every student organization is required to have an advisor. Some serve only in name, but others truly excel in advising. Behind almost every successful student organization is an advisor with the “right stuff.” Below are some qualities that will help you to make the best of your experience as an advisor.

- A strong belief in the organization
- The ability to serve as a role model
- The ability to motivate others
- The desire to help students
- Familiarity with USF rules and regulations governing organizations
- Enthusiasm
- The willingness to commit sufficient time to the organization
- A sense of humor
- Willingness to listen to students
- The ability to interact with others
- The ability to teach leadership development
- An interest in student’s personal growth and development beyond the classroom
- Serve as a resource to the organization
- Interpret and clarify university policy and procedure
- Suggest program ideas
- Serve as a personal role model
- Advise officers in decision-making matters
- Provide historical continuity for the organization
- Act consistently with what you say
- Allow the group to succeed
- Allow the group to fail
- Don’t control the group
- Don’t run the organization meetings
- Don’t have veto power over decisions
- Don’t be the sole recruiter for new members.
- Don’t know it all
- Don’t say “I told you so”
- Don’t break promises
- Don’t take ownership of the group
- Don’t be the leader

## Advisor Involvement Expectation Rating Sheet

Have every member of the organization complete this exercise. It is designed to gauge the members' perception of your level of involvement. Different activities and events can change to suit those of your organization. Please circle the number that best represents your impression of your adviser's level of involvement.

	<b>Low involvement</b>				<b>High involvement</b>		
1. Attendance at weekly meetings Comments:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Speaking during weekly meetings Comments:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Attendance at monthly activities Comments:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Making decisions for the organization Comments:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Serve as a resource during weekly meetings Comments:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Available to meet individually with members Comments:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Assisting in travel preparations for conferences Comments:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Other:							

*Form provided courtesy of Dunkel, N.W., Schuh, J.H. (1998). Advising student groups and organizations. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco. 91-92.*